

Live off the Land: Survival Gardening Basics

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LIVE OFF THE LAND



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Live off the Land

Survival Gardening Basics

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Why You Need to Read This Book

Since the beginning of time, the acts of survival and gardening have gone hand-in-hand. Though today many view the practice of gardening as a healthy hobby or pastime, the truth is that those of us who know how to produce and harvest their own crops have an upper hand in contrast with the rest of society: should the circumstances ever arise in which our access to food would be drastically limited (or altogether cut off), the green-thumbed members of our population would still be able to live comfortably. In that regard, gardening isn't simply a hobby; rather, it's a way of life that's been in practice for centuries, and still remains as the most basic, safest, and guaranteed means of acquiring food known to mankind.

Even in terms of a personal emergency, gardening can prepare you in ways that other methods fall short. Survival gardening lets you ready yourself for virtually any drastic circumstance, whether the economy collapses to the point at which people find themselves destitute, or a major storm wipes out the resources and transportation lines to an entire region. If ever you find yourself penniless and unable to pay the grocery bill, your lush garden can sustain you and see you through the tough times. Likewise, if your region were to be wiped out due to a catastrophic storm and it took prolonged periods of time for aid to reach you, the garden you worked hard to cultivate would still put food on the table.

Of course, you might think that stockpiling offers the solution to these catastrophes, and in a way, it does. But, the truth of the matter is that stockpiling provides only a temporary solution. At a certain point, you're going to run out of the supplies that you've collected; there's no plausible way for you to store an infinite supply of food, or one that will be replenished on its own. The most promising way to secure your future is to learn how to grow your own food so that it will, in fact, be able to last you through the foreseeable future, should any disasters arise.

Think of it this way: how were our ancestors able to survive through the Great Depression and World War II? There was rationing, of course, but many individuals had to rely on home-grown produce and goods developed by volunteer farmers. They were largely

responsible for providing food for individuals on a national and local level. Nowadays, though, the art of gardening is lost on many; the demands of a 24/7 workforce and a chaotic, nonstop world has left many people with little time for hobbies or pleasures, especially something as seemingly antiquated as gardening. After all, who would spend the time – or put in the extra effort – to grow his or her own food, when there are grocery stores, farmer's markets, and natural food stores where we can purchase fresh produce with convenience?

Here's the thing, though: growing your own produce isn't just a hobby or relaxing pastime, nor should it be viewed as such. Of course, if those are your reasons for growing your own goods in the first place, then that's fine! Gardening is fulfilling, enjoyable, and some even say, soothing for the soul. But let's not overlook the fact that growing your own crops was once a necessity for survival, and should still be considered as such.

Unfortunately, the art of survival is a skill that's lost on many individuals in today's world. Yet, you don't have to be an extremist to recognize the fact that there are changes taking place every day, and that the shifts that our world is experiencing have the potential to do great damage on our environment or ways of life. There are no guarantees that the comforts we rely on day in and day out will be here tomorrow, which begs the question: if the food supplies you rely on were taken away right now, how would you survive for the foreseeable future?

This guide answers that question for you. For individuals who have zero familiarity with gardening, those who have lived in an urban environment their whole lives, or even those who are skilled gardeners but would like to learn a bit more about the survival aspect of the practice, this guide is intended for anyone. There's a wealth of information to be learned about how you can survive off the land, and whether you're looking for peace of mind in the fact that you'll outlive a disaster or you simply want to learn how to make your own food from the seed to the table, then this guide is a must-read.

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Introduction

First things, first, I know you're excited to start reading and learning what you need to know about Living off the Land but, we wanted to let you in on something you might miss out on otherwise. And that's an invitation to our mailing list that promotes 100% FREE eBooks!

So yeah, we've got a pretty sweet mailing list. We publish eBooks every once in a while (all our non-fiction titles are free) and we thought it might be nice if we could give you a heads-up next time we put something out there. We also share other FREE eBooks by other authors. So, if advanced notice is something you're into just follow the link below and we'll send you a quick daily email about a lot of great FREE stuff:

<http://www.pointedpublishing.com/live-off-the-land>

Alright, let's get started shall we?

The amount of possibilities that gardening offers is virtually limitless. From the pickiest of eaters to those who will eat anything put in front of them, there's something for everyone when it comes to fresh produce. Of course, factors such as location and available space will determine which types of crops you'll be able to produce, but you'll be surprised to find that you can create a bountiful amount of food with very little resources.

This guide will walk you through the processes of establishing your gardening objectives and then framing them based on your limiting factors. You'll learn how to plan and plot your survival garden, and where to start even if you haven't ever sown a seed in your life. For the learned gardener, you'll find interesting tips about storing produce year-round, practicing all-seasons gardening, and using animal husbandry to work to your advantage.

If you're wondering about the amount of time and work that you'll need to put into your garden, the answer is that it depends. Like any other aspect of survival, the amount of time and work you're

willing to put into it is up to you. Similar to stockpiling, the success of your garden will be largely dependent on the amount of time you feel comfortable devoting to it. Of course, if you choose to plant a large spread of various crops and take up half of your backyard with your garden, you're inevitably going to have more produce than the individual who only has the time (and perhaps, space) to grow a couple of potted plants.

The bottom line is this, though: growing some produce is better than growing none. By choosing to produce your own vegetables or fruit, you're making a decision to become self-sufficient, at least partially, instead of relying on factors over which you have no control. You don't have to take on an alarmist point-of-view to begin to consider what might happen if there were a crop or gas shortage, or if transportation to your area were to be blocked as a result of a disaster. Anyone who's lived through a hurricane, tornado, or any other sort of natural disaster can relate: eventually, help does indeed arrive, but the chaos that ensues beforehand can become quite frightening.

Rioting, looting, and competition all come into play when people are robbed of their necessities. Individuals will go to extremes to protect their families, or to preserve their own lives. Why not take a bit of weight off your shoulders and develop these crucial skills so that you can rest assured that indeed, if disastrous circumstances were to arise, you could survive on your own?

Aside from these more crucial aspects of gardening, there are other simpler, more immediately gratifying results that come from learning to grow your own crops. For one, gardening has the potential to save you a great deal of money, especially if you eat a lot of produce on a regular basis. Prices for fresh goods have risen dramatically in recent years, but the costs of seeds and plants which you can grow in your garden have remained relatively low. The return on investment will always be worthwhile when it comes to gardening.

Also, odd climate patterns have depleted the supplies of many fruits and vegetables in recent years. If you've taken a trip to the grocery store at any point and seen either a shocking hike in price for one particular item, or worse, a complete lack of it, then you know what we're referring to here. There's nothing worse than being unable to find that one fruit, vegetable, or herb that you need for a recipe, or

having to pay an outrageous price as result of a shortage. If you had elected to grow your own, you could have saved yourself the trouble and cost.

Moreover, many people today are choosing to purchase organic produce, and for good reason. We still know very little about what preservatives and additives do to our bodies over a prolonged period of time, but we know enough now to understand that choosing all-natural goods is almost always the safer choice. Yet, the sticker price of organic foods is oftentimes much higher than that of the nonorganic alternatives. We shouldn't have to pay more for attempting to be healthier, but until a serious change is made, there's little that can be done to combat the issue. That's where gardening comes in. When you grow your own fruits, vegetables, and herbs, you have control over the entire process. If you want to keep chemical plant foods and weed killers out of your garden to keep it entirely organic, then you have the power to do so. Every aspect of the growing process is in your hands.

So, if you're ready to make a change that will be healthy for your body and mind, then read on! With the help of this guide and a little bit of your time and effort, you can develop your own garden that has the potential to put colorful and flavor-packed dishes on your table, whether it's during times of celebration or as a means of surviving in adverse circumstances.

Assessing Your Objectives and Limiting Factors

When it comes to growing your own crops, your goals should be realistic, but should also reflect your needs and desires. Yet, before you get too excited about growing dozens of your favorite veggies, it's best to first take into consideration the factors that will limit your capabilities. That way, you'll go into this endeavor fully prepared and with goals that can be met successfully.

Some beginners fail to weigh their limiting factors, and instead adopt a "wait and see" mentality about gardening. For some, that works fine, but in order to optimize your time and efforts, it's best to carefully select the types of produce you'll plant, and where. This is especially important if you plan to develop a garden not simply for the purpose of pleasure, but also to put nutrient-rich food on the table and sustain your resources for the sake of survival.

With that being said, it's not hard for the beginning gardener to feel overwhelmed with choices. There are hundreds of crop species available for planting, so it can certainly be difficult to make the selection when it comes to choosing which to incorporate into your garden. Yet, these choices are of critical importance. Picking plants at random, or simply because you prefer them, isn't the best approach, and it could leave you dealing with a major headache down the road. There are plants that perform better than others based on location, time of year, and climate, and such factors are the ones that you should be examining to base your decisions. Even if it sounds like a great idea to plant a pineapple in your backyard, living in the northeast will prevent you from seeing any tangible results. And, there's nothing more depressing than knowing that you've put time and effort into something that will inevitably fail.

There is good news, though. As mentioned earlier in this guide, you can still produce a lot of food with relatively little resources. Even if you have a fairly small amount of space for gardening, there's a possibility that your crops could still yield impressive results. Don't be discouraged by your limiting factors; instead, approach your gardening practice knowing that your ability to work with what you have is what will make your chosen crops thrive to their greatest potential.

Assessing Your Limitations

First, and most importantly, you must recognize that there are factors which will limit your gardening abilities. Every gardener – even farmers with a great deal of acreage and bountiful tools, manpower, and other resources – has his or her own unique set of limitations. For instance, gardeners in the southern states may not be able to grow garlic as well as a northerner would, but the farmer in a northeastern state would have a difficult time trying to grow citrus fruits like a Floridian. Likewise, a city-dweller would face limitation due to lack of space, whereas a resident of a rural community might have access to a sprawling backyard in which a garden could thrive. Yet, if the soil is no good or if the shade inhibits the plants' ability to grow, all of that land will be of little worth in terms of developing a stable garden. So, whatever your situation, keep in mind that every single gardener faces certain limitations; the trick is learning how to work with what you have available to you.

To begin assessing your own limitations, start with this simple question: How much land is available to me? Your gardening capabilities will be primarily determined by the amount of land you can access. Some sources suggest planning approximately a quarter acre to two acres in order to feed one person in entirety. If you plan to grow wood for heating purposes, you'd need an additional acre per household. To compound that, you'd need several more acres for dairy purposes, if you choose to raise cattle. Of course, you'd then also have to harvest more food to feed your livestock. You can see how the issue of land availability could compound rather quickly, but again, there's always room to work with whatever resources you have available to you.

If, for instance, you have very little or even no space available for gardening, do not despair. You can still grow your own plants, and you might even be able to rely on a network of neighbors so that together, you could all grow crops separately which would equate to a full garden when combined. If you live in a densely populated or urban area, you might also want to consider acquiring more land in a rural community through renting or joining a land-share community. Or, find out if your area has a community garden in a shared or public property. If not, why not approach your town council? In many instances, councilmembers are receptive to initiatives that provide healthy ways to better the community. Developing a community

garden is certainly a healthy, worthwhile cause! Some individuals with limited land also choose to practice guerilla gardening – of course, that’s a decision that must be made by you, and requires a thorough examination of consequences and strategic planning.

Of course, there are other means by which you could grow your own plants, even without access to open land. Consider the layout of your house or apartment: do you have access to balconies, window sills, hanging baskets, window boxes, or rooftops? You might even want to consider taking your garden indoors, and simply growing plants with the help of some artificial light sources. Don’t rush into choosing a location; take your time with this decision and assess your availability. There are stories of gardeners who have even witnessed success in growing food right under their kitchen sinks. Even if it seems like you have no options, there are most likely some alternatives that you haven’t even considered yet.

Let’s say you do have access to some land, though. The next step is to consider this: What are you allowed to do with that land? Understanding your limitations isn’t simply about assessing what you can and can’t do with the land; it’s also about understanding what you’re actually allowed to do with the land available to you. For instance, you may be limited by the restrictions of your homeowners’ association, city council, or other governing bodies based on your location. Some gardeners are prohibited from growing in their front yards, planting trees without permission, or keeping livestock on the premises. There are also restrictions for individuals living in national and state parks. Be sure to research your area so that you fully understand the restrictions, rights, and obligations that you’ll face in your gardening endeavor. Most importantly, make sure to do this ahead of time: the last thing you want is for your hard work to be uprooted due to the fact that you didn’t research the restrictions for your area. You also don’t want to have to face a fine or any other sort of punishment for negligence.

After you’ve determined how much space is available to you and what you’re allowed to do with it, you’ll then want to establish a budget. Ask yourself: how much am I willing to spend on my garden? Even some of the most successful, high-yielding gardens can be developed with little financial investment. Yet, the monetary resources you have available right now will determine what you’re going to be able to do with your garden in the near future. If you have only a

small amount of money available for gardening right now, it just means that you may have to work at a slower pace in the beginning stages. Of course, if you have a significant amount of funds to dedicate to your garden, you might have your sights set on a heated greenhouse. Each individual has a budget different from the next, but you can still create a garden that will mesh with your available resources.

Moreover, budgeting doesn't refer to money alone. You'll also have to assess the amount of time that you can realistically dedicate to your garden. Take your schedule into consideration to determine the types of growing techniques that you can use, and how much produce you'll be able to grow each year.

Next, you'll need to assess your soil type. There will be a huge difference in the methodology of your gardening practice depending on which type of soil you have. If you're basically living on bedrock, for instance, you'll definitely need to add some soil. On the other hand, if you have a backyard that's rich, deep, and fertile, then you're already primed for a perfect garden. How compact is your soil, and what kind of stone concentration does it have? All of these factors have to be considered, and will help to determine which types of tools you'll need to use to prepare for planting. For instance, soil that has a high concentration of rocks and stones might damage a rototiller, so you'll likely have to do a lot more work by hand. Also take into consideration how your soil concentration varies from one spot of your yard to the next. The type of soil you have in the front of your house could be wildly different from what you have to work with in the back. Down the road, when you begin to determine the types of plants that will make up your garden, you're going to have to take your soil content into consideration. For now, keep in mind that you should select the healthiest, most fertile soil available to you for your garden location. You can always add more (and will most likely have to), but it's helpful to have a good starting point if possible.

Aside from soil content, you should also think about the climate in which you live. Though this would seem like a pretty commonsense detail, you'd be surprised to find out how many seasoned gardeners still witness failed crops due to the fact that they didn't properly research the plant's ideal climate. For the most part, you're going to need to do a little bit of legwork here. In some cases, you won't be able to rely on garden centers alone to provide you with the

information you need. Before making your decisions, consider a few crucial factors: When are your earliest – and latest – frost dates? You should be able to access this information easily online. How cold does it typically get during the winter months, on average? What's the typical duration of your area's frost-free period, and what can you expect to see in terms of the highest possible temperatures during the summer months? Depending on your available resources, you may be able to protect fragile plants as the temperature drops with the help of glass or plastic, but that does involve some risk. Unless you have access to a heated greenhouse or plan to grow your plants indoors with the use of grow lights, your climate is a major limiting factor that you're going to have to work around. Don't worry, though: unless you're living in an extremely harsh climate, you should still be able to grow a fair amount of produce outdoors.

Once you've considered all of these factors, it's time to take into consideration any other existing limitations that you may be facing. How much manpower will you have access to when it comes to gardening? Will others help you tend to your garden if needed, or are you embarking on this adventure all on your own? If it's up to you alone, you'll need to take into consideration how much effort you can realistically put into maintaining the garden of your choice. Do you suffer from joint or back pain? If so, that could be a limiting factor for you. Will you be vacationing during the time when your garden will need care and maintenance? Be sure to take all of these additional limiting factors into consideration; if not, you might find yourself with an overgrown garden that will be more difficult to maintain than it would have been if you had planned ahead. Don't rule out the option of hiring help; even just asking a teenage neighbor to come by and weed the garden every so often could cost you very little, but save you a great deal of hassle. Or, work out a deal in which a friend or neighbor can have access to some of the goods in your garden if they agree to tend it while you're away or if you need assistance otherwise.

After you've carefully considered all of your limitations, you can then begin to work on the more exciting aspect of planning: considering your wants and needs.

What are Your Priorities?

Depending on whether you're planting simply for survival purposes, or if you'd like a lush, varied garden to live well off the

land, your gardening priorities are going to be different from the next person's. You'll have to make certain choices which will affect your planning processes, so taking a moment to assess your goals is a good step before you find yourself too far down the road.

If your priority is to plant a garden that could see you through a catastrophe or natural disaster, then your goal should be to plant a significant amount of calorie-dense crops, such as parsnips, sweet potatoes, and regular potatoes. Although a diet consisting of meat and potatoes alone might not be the most nutritious plan available, it would still allow you to survive. If, however, you're looking for more variety, you're going to have to assess your options. For one thing, you'll need more land, and you'll probably wind up using more of your other resources, such as time, manpower, and money, too.

In addition, you'll want to ask yourself when you plan to use your harvest. Fresh, home-grown organic crops often need to be used quicker than the average store-bought varieties, because they aren't loaded with preservatives or stored as efficiently as they could be inside of grocery stores. Many gardeners know that when they pick a crop, it should be consumed that very day for the freshest possible outcome. Of course, you'll have a bit of leeway depending on the plant variety, storage options, and other factors. Some gardeners also find that they don't always have to pick a crop immediately once it's ready; if there's a head of lettuce in the garden that looks as if it's ready, it can usually go a day or two before it absolutely has to be picked. You can plan your meals throughout the week based on these principles, if you plan on eating your garden goods during harvest time.

Of course, there's another alternative, which is a tactic that's often used by survivalists. Many fresh crops can be preserved and kept to be eaten at a later date; namely, during the winter months when the weather limits gardening options. Some ideal means of preservation include curing, pickling, freezing, canning, fermenting, and drying your fresh produce. While each of these methods is effective and can increase the lifespan of your crops, don't forget that this will require additional work and time, and may also require some additional resources. For instance, canning, pickling, and fermenting require the use of sterile cans, so you'll need to purchase those new instead of reusing them. Also, drying your food usually requires some tools, but many people choose to look at such expenses as

investments.

Many gardeners find that for them, there's a "sweet spot" which allows them to do a little bit of both: they can enjoy some of their harvest when it's fresh, but they can also store some of their produce to last them through the winter. There's nothing like making a homemade sauce in the middle of winter that has peppers and herbs that you grew and picked in your own garden months ago. There are many hearty vegetables that store quite well when frozen, so if you find yourself with an abundance of one crop that you didn't foresee doing quite so well, don't feel as if you have to eat it all right away. You can usually store most garden food quite successfully, and in some cases, it can last up to a few months when prepared properly.

Some farmers are fortunate enough to eat fresh all year round. If this sounds appealing to you, just remember that you'll have to devote additional time and effort into maintaining crops on a regular basis. Don't forget about your limiting factors, such as space, location, and time and money, either. However, eating fresh all the time certainly isn't impossible to do; it just requires some planning in advance, as well as learning how to grow crops indoors if your climate restricts you from planting during the winter.

Another thing to consider when planning your garden is whether you'd prefer to have the land – or your own efforts – working more to your advantage in terms of efficiency. Some gardening methods may combine a bit of each element, but rarely do they require both in totality. In other words, when you adopt a land-efficient gardening approach, you'll grow more food in a limited amount of space, but there will be a significant amount of work required. Conversely, the work-efficient methods of gardening allow you to sit back a bit more, letting the land do most of the work. Yet, these strategies typically require the availability of a bit more land. When deciding on which type of approach to take, be sure to be honest with yourself. While it's okay to set ambitious goals, it's also a good idea to be realistic, too. Again, ask yourself how much work you're really willing to do, and whether or not it's feasible to get help elsewhere. Don't set yourself up for disappointment, especially if you have little gardening experience to begin with. You'll only wind up feeling frustrated. Remember that your goal here is to put good-tasting, nutritious food on the table. Your harvest can be as fruitful or as scarce as you want it to be; it's still a better alternative than

acquiring fresh produce through other means.

Now that you're familiar with work-efficient and land-efficient gardening in general, let's take a look at some examples of each.

Some examples of land-efficient gardening styles include square-foot digging, double digging, intercropping, succession planting, and vertical stacking.

Square-foot gardening is a popular gardening method that was developed by Mel Bartholomew. He came up with this approach to combat wasted space; he felt that traditional farming methods failed to use up all of the available space as best as possible. Thus, rather than planting long, far-reaching rows of crops, square-foot gardening takes a grid-style approach. Square-foot gardeners typically construct their barriers out of wood. Each square should be densely packed with plants. The beauty of this set up is the fact that it allows for each square to be harvested and resown whenever necessary; but again, due to the fact that it's a land-efficient method, it will require some extra elbow grease on your part. Nonetheless, many beginners and small-scale gardeners swear by this method, due to its scaled-down approach and the fact that it provides the opportunity to plant a wide variety of different crops. Moreover, research suggests that you could save up to 80% of space when using square-foot gardening in contrast with planting in rows. This approach is ideal for someone who's looking for variety in produce, but should be avoided by those looking to create sizeable surpluses of nutrient-dense food for the purposes of storage and survival.

Double-digging is often referred to as the French market garden approach. This method will work to your advantage only if you have a good deal of manpower to start out with, and rich, deep, abundant soil. The advantage to using the double-digging method is that it creates an environment in which you can densely pack your crops of choice. If you're converting your lawn to design a garden by double-digging, you'll need to remove the top layer, which is approximately one spade blade deep, and set it aside. Then, you'll remove an additional layer of about the same depth. The top layer should then be placed on the bottom, with the grass facing down. You'll then place the soil that was formerly on the bottom on top. This soil is ideal for growing deep, straight roots, but be careful not to step on it to disturb

it.

Intercropping is used for planting crops that grow rather quickly in combination with plants that grow slowly. Once you harvest the fast-growing crops earlier in the season, the slower-growing crops will be able to take up the resources that then become available to them, such as sunlight and space. They can then finish growing to their fullest potential. If you choose to use this method of planting, be sure to do your research to find out which plants thrive earlier in the seasons, and which ones are better later on, and stagger them accordingly.

Succession planting is a popular method of gardening that's used by many practiced gardeners and farmers. It's simple to do; just sow new plants as soon as you're done harvesting the last ones. That way, you're using up all of the available space, so that as soon as even a small section of your garden opens up, it's filled immediately afterwards.

Work-efficient gardening approaches include permaculture, growing local varieties, mulching, and no tilling.

Permaculture takes place when a gardener attempts to mimic the natural world by developing a self-sustaining system. Aside from a kitchen garden, a permaculture gardener might opt to have a food forest in which he or she can routinely pick from fruit trees, perennial plants, shrubs, and additional self-sowing annuals. Experienced permaculture gardeners know how to strategically plant these crops so that they neighbor one another to provide the nutrients needed for optimal growth. This method is so advanced that the landscaping effectively provides a continuous supply of water on its own. While it's quite difficult to plot out and plant, a permaculture garden is desirable due to its self-sufficiency.

If you opt to grow local varieties, you'll save yourself some time and trouble. While not necessarily a specific growing method in itself, planting crops that are adapted to your regional climate and soil will do well on their own. Thus, they will require less time and attention on your part. Inquire with local farmers or do a little research online to find out about the crops that will thrive best in your

area.

Many gardeners use the mulching process, which requires the addition of a new top layer of soil used to protect your plants. You can use grass clippings, wood chips, or even paper to mulch; almost anything works, as long as it insulates the plants. The mulch is designed to stunt weed growth by keeping them from obtaining adequate light. At the same time, it regulates temperature and keeps the helpful organisms that your plants need inside the soil. A well-developed mulch is also intended to break down over time, which will add even further nutrients to the soil for conditioning.

Some gardeners opt to use a special fabric specifically designed to act as a barrier against weeds. This material is breathable and easy to rip, so to use it, you simply roll out the length you need and secure rocks on top of it along the corners so that it won't blow away. Then, when you're ready to plant, you'll simply make holes in the barrier and sow your seeds or plants as usual. Just make sure to be careful about the size of the holes you use; you want them to be big enough so that the plant has enough room to grow, but not too large to the point where weeds can come through and take over your crops. Also, if you're using a fabric that isn't biodegradable, be sure to remove it from your garden after your harvest is done.

Another method of work-efficient gardening is the no till technique. To use this method, you'll avoid digging the soil after the patch or field has been established. This allows the beneficial organic matter in the soil to thrive, and it also ensures water retention. Thus, you won't have to water your plants nearly as often as you would otherwise. Best of all, you won't have to strain yourself with digging.

One other thing to consider when you're planning out your garden is whether you're embarking on your gardening journey for personal reasons, or for the benefit of the planet. You don't have to share your views with others, but it's important to assess your goals ahead of time on your own. Ask yourself whether or not you'll be comfortable using conventional herbicides and pesticides. The same goes for fertilizers and plant food: are you willing to use all-natural, organic sources, or do you prefer to go the conventional route? Will you use chemicals in your garden – just as long as they don't make direct contact with the edible parts of your plants? If you're choosing

to keep livestock, what means are you willing to use to ensure the welfare of your animals? Your perspective on such issues will be the determining factor through which you inform your choices, and it is yours alone. As long as you've put some thought into each of these questions, then you'll be better prepared to tackle the planning stages required for developing a successful garden.

If it helps, feel free to go through each of the questions listed in this chapter and physically write down the answers. Having written goals increases your odds for success; and, many gardeners physically make lists, diagrams, and other plans to make sure that they're not leaving anything out or being overzealous in their gardening goals. This proves to be especially beneficial for the beginner. Having preparations in place makes it much more likely that you'll succeed in your first round of gardening, which will encourage you to continue gardening for years to come!

Making Plans for a Survival Garden

Planning a garden can be overwhelming, especially for first-timers. Yet, when approached with a calm attitude and a patient mind, the planning stages are quite painless. After all, you're doing something that will prove to be rewarding in terms of giving you peace of mind and creating delicious, healthy food that you, and perhaps the rest of your family and maybe even some friends or neighbors, will enjoy.

Needless to say, you'll be facing a lot of options in the beginning. Where do you begin? If you feel stuck, go back to the previous chapter and take a look at your limitations. While perhaps not the most encouraging aspect of this endeavor, your limiting factors will help remind you of the things that you can or can't accomplish in developing your garden. This chapter will help you take it from there. First, we're going to help you to develop your very own Gardening Purpose. One way to think of your Gardening Purpose is that it should be akin to a mission statement. Feel free to revisit your Gardening Purpose if you ever feel overwhelmed or frustrated, and don't worry about making it "official;" you may find that you'll need to readjust it along the way. Unforeseen circumstances can make gardening either easier or more difficult than you may have originally thought, so there's no need to put too much stress on yourself from the onset. The Gardening Purpose is simply meant to act as a roadmap which will guide you to your end goal. Let's take a look:

Your Gardening Purpose

Take a moment to think about the resources and limitations you identified in the first chapter, and try to align these factors with the type of gardener you hope to be. Perhaps your gardening goals are more based on needs – such as the basic need to survive – and less about having a variety of home-grown fresh veggies. Now, once you identify the type of gardener that you hope to be, it's time to achieve execution by making that goal an actual commitment.

Like any other worthwhile, long-term project, growing and maintaining a garden requires a level of commitment that will vary based on what you want to achieve. To optimize your time and efforts, you have to establish goals and hold yourself accountable for

the achievement of those goals. Your Gardening Purpose is designed to accomplish these objectives.

You don't have to write a novel to determine your purpose for gardening; it only needs to be a paragraph or two. In your write-up (and yes, it's wise to physically write down your purpose), you should answer these questions: What is the purpose of my garden? Whether you're trying to supplement your grocery store purchases with nutrient-rich, super-fresh produce, or you're planning to prepare yourself in the event of a prolonged food or income shortage with the help of high-calorie home-grown foods, state your objective plainly and clearly. Perhaps you want to adopt an off-the-grid, homesteader lifestyle; whatever your goal, make sure that you've familiarized yourself with it wholly and completely. It will act as the driving force by which you can move forward with the planning steps.

Don't bog yourself down with the details, though. You'll probably want to list the categories of crops that you intend to plant (and animals you hope to raise, if applicable), but you don't need to name specific species. In time, these details will present themselves, due to factors such as availability, price, and so forth. By admitting that you may not have absolute control over every minor aspect of this endeavor, you'll alleviate a lot of stress. Keep your Gardening Purpose broad so that it's flexible enough to still hold its value even if you encounter obstacles.

Even if you feel a bit corny (gardening pun!) while writing down your Gardening Purpose, don't hold back from emphasizing the values that mean the most to you. A purpose composed with conviction and drive will make you feel more inclined to live up to it, and some of the minor details will come easier to you. Plus, you'll feel as if your hard work and time spent on your garden will be validated. So, if you're creating a garden to feed your family and teach your children how to eat healthy and grow their own produce, then by all means, include that in your Gardening Purpose! If your goal is to go completely organic and eliminate the use of any outside fertilizer, then mention that, too. This is your project, and you can shape it to meet your personal needs and desires. Also, don't forget to have fun with it! A Gardening Purpose can be as simple as wanting to enjoy food that you've grown on your own from start to finish – that's an admirable purpose in itself, and an objective that you'll meet with ease to experience a sense of reward and accomplishment.

Creating a Strategic Vision

The next step after identifying your Gardening Purpose is creating a strategic vision. Feel free to let your mind wander as you envision rows upon rows of lush vegetables just waiting to be hand-picked. Just keep in mind that eventually, you should put your best ideas into practice by aligning them with the goals that you identified in your Gardening Purpose.

As mentioned before, some gardeners choose to develop a sketch in order to guide them. This could be a literal sketch – a loose representation of what you plan to plant in your garden and where – or, if you're driven by specificity, feel free to measure your garden and draw it down to scale.

Pay attention to certain areas within your potential gardening area that stand out more than others. What kinds of adjustments will you have to make? Is the space you plan to plant your garden an area in which your dog normally roams? Think of how you use your space right now. Does it seem like there are some areas that seem to belong next to one another? Do you have spaces that are traveled through frequently; conversely, are there spots that you rarely walk through or are difficult to get to?

Also, it's a good idea to ask yourself whether or not you're looking for an herb garden. If you would like to grow herbs for medicinal purposes, you don't need to keep them close to your kitchen, but if you plan on cooking with fresh herbs, they should probably be relatively close to the area in which you do your food prep. Gardeners often set out with the intent to grow fresh herbs that they'll be able to grab with ease, but instead tend to find themselves in the middle of a recipe and having to trek through difficult terrain quickly. Or, even if your herb garden is easy to access, it could be difficult to navigate it at nighttime. Keep all of these factors in mind when you do your planning.

You might even want to take your daily routine into consideration. If there's a patch of yard that you pass by on your way out each morning, perhaps that's a good place to plant the types of crops that require more attention than others.

When assessing your potential garden plot, you might also want to consider how you could use existing structures – either natural or manmade – for barriers. Hedges, pathways, ponds, fences, driveways, and other types of borders should all be taken into consideration. These can be used to your advantage, if you plan right.

You might want to develop an objective for each of your available spaces; this is the approach that most farmers and gardeners take. However, you shouldn't be afraid to take advantage of your space by combining multiple functions for one space, so long as they're beneficial to one another. For instance, you might want to place your chicken coop in your orchard. That would work to your advantage because the trees and shrubs would act as protection against larger predators, and the chicken droppings would organically feed and fertilize your fruits and berries. Of course, you might face some limiting factors – your homeowners' association might not approve of your chicken coop in the front yard – but perhaps you could instead use your herb foliage and berry shrubs to complement the flower beds there.

Once you begin to develop an idea as to how you can use the different spaces available to you, you'll also have to consider how the watering process could affect your plan. Will your hose be able to reach the garden, or will you have to purchase a longer one? Do you intend to use a sprinkler? Also, if you're going to have livestock, you'll have to think about how you'll get water to the animals, too. If your climate is particularly dry, you may have to plan your plants so that they're close to existing water sources. Or, you may want to consider implementing more water access to nearby areas. Watering cans, though sometimes cumbersome, can provide a solution, especially if you don't have an extremely large garden.

Developing Your Plan

Beginners, especially, tend to balk at the idea of drawing a garden plan. It feels foreign to them to sit down and take a pencil to paper to map out their gardens. They might also feel intimidated and think that only professionals – such as landscapers and large-scale farmers – take the time to draw out their gardening plans. The truth is that although professionals do in fact use drawn plans to strategize their gardens, anyone can draw out their own gardening plans. Again,

you don't have to be a geography major to create a rough design of your prospective garden – just keep it simple if you're unsure of what to do.

Or, if you have a surveyor's map of your property, consider using that to help you plan out your space. If not, consider using a scale to make your map as realistic as possible. In other words, you might say that one inch on your map will equate to ten feet of space in your yard. You can measure the border of your land using a yardstick or measuring tape, and draw it to scale with a pencil and paper as you go. If you're not working with a yard, you can still draw up the space inside your home (or whichever other areas are available to you). You might even want to take into consideration the floor and counter space that's available. Be sure to include any major objects in your drawing, such as other homes or buildings, as well as fences and any other types of barriers you may encounter. If you're drawing a smaller space, such as a balcony or window planter, be sure to make a note of any areas that are too shady to be suitable for planting purposes. Finally, incorporate any existing natural features, such as bodies of water or large bushes and trees. One other thing that you may want to include – but is often overlooked – is the slope of the area that you're working with. It's much easier to work with flat land.

One hassle-free way to access a property map is to check online to see if there's a satellite image of your location already in existence. Google Earth and similar features allow you to see a bird's eye view of your property, which can be extremely helpful when plotting a garden.

When you have your property map ready, make several copies before getting into the drawing stages. You don't want to limit yourself to only one copy, in case you make a mistake or want a fresh start. Now you can begin to incorporate your plants. Draw them in as you please, but pay attention to the layout. You may find that some of your original ideas may not transfer as well as you'd hoped; or, you may find that you have more space to work with than you previously thought. Now is a good time to recall your Gardening Purpose: did all of your intentions make it onto paper? If not, perhaps you need to do a revision and make sure that you incorporate each element from your mission statement.

If you're still lost in terms of where to start, don't worry. Plotting your garden can be a daunting task, especially if you have little to no gardening experience. By the time you're finished with this guide, you'll have all of the knowledge you need to assess which plants will do best where, and how you should divvy up your space to use it as best as possible. Don't feel as if you have to rush into the drawing stage; being better informed will help you to understand what's feasible in terms of space and plant performance.

Writing down the Steps

If you're a beginner, or if your project encompasses a lot of details and variables, then you should probably opt to write down the steps you'll need to take in order to complete your garden. This is especially true if you intend to create a garden that will take you through various seasons.

For more audacious goals, break down the steps in an annual, seasonal, monthly, or even weekly segments. Keep in mind the amount of experience you have, as well as your resources and limitations. If you have never grown vegetables before, or you work a 50-hour work week and won't have access to any additional help, you're going to have a difficult time turning 10,000 square feet of grass into a vegetable garden in one year's time. The good news is that taking the time to break down the project in manageable steps will help you to develop realistic milestones.

Again, don't set yourself up for failure; that will only lead to your hard work being overshadowed by a potential problem that you won't have the time to address, such as a weed infestation. A more manageable approach to the example listed above would be to tackle 2,500 square feet per year to complete a 10,000-square foot vegetable garden within four years. If your goals sound far-reaching, don't lose hope. The time will pass anyway. Gardening, when approached with an open mind, can provide a lifetime of pleasure and sustenance.

Beginning the Process

You've done the planning. Your purpose, visions, and calculations have all been spelled out, and you feel more prepared than ever to build your very own survival garden. So, let's get started!

If you have any gardening knowledge, you're probably familiar with the fact that the ideal time to start is typically the springtime. This is when most farmers and gardeners opt to sow their seeds or plant store-bought seedlings. Usually, these types of plants yield a single summer harvest. Yet, if you're gardening for survival purposes, your plan of attack will probably be a bit different. Moreover, if you'll be working indoors to grow your garden with the help of artificial light, then you don't have to worry about which season it is. Also, even if it's not springtime right now, there is always work to be done in the garden – no matter what time of year it is.

Spring

If it's springtime where you live right now, then your primary goal should be preparing your space. What do you need to do in order to get your designated garden spot ready for planting? Whether it's digging, tilling, constructing fences, or all of these processes combined, it's time to get to work. You may also need to source seeds and plants and begin the actual preparations of raising plants for a summer harvest.

Summer

If it's already summertime, you still have work to do. Now is a great time to source seeds and plants for an autumn or winter crop.

Autumn

If summer has already passed, it's probable that most of the growing has just ended. Yet, now is the perfect time to plant and fruit trees. Also, there are a handful of crops that can be planted during the autumn months, such as garlic and onions. Now is also a good time to sow the seeds for early spring vegetables and protected winter greens, including salad leaves.

Winter

Even in the winter, you can still prep your growing spaces. You might want to use a mild day for building your fence, and you can also make sure to properly care for your tools throughout the winter months. Any architectural changes that you need to make for your garden area should be taken care of during the winter, as long as the weather permits it. Also, you can source seeds for the earliest sowing before you approach the last frost date of the season.

Picking your Tools

When selecting the tools for your survival garden, you'll have to take a few key factors into consideration. For one thing, your budget will largely determine which types of tools you can purchase without spending too much. You should also consider the size of the land that you're working with, as well as your ideals. For instance, whether your goal is to live off the grid or simply have a more sustainable life on your own, then these factors will come into play when you select your tools. Petrol- and electricity-driven tools have different pros and cons, and you'll want to weigh these against your ideals to see which selection will work best for you.

There's an abundance of gardening tools available today, and many more options than our ancestors ever had access to. The bottom line is that your tool and equipment purchases are entirely up to you, and nearly everything is optional. Specialized tools do make the job quicker and easier, but they're certainly not mandatory. In truth, the only must-haves – whether your garden spans several acres or is situated on a window sill – are a hand trowel, a watering can, and a hand cultivator. Of course, you can shape these needs to fit your situation; for example, if you have a hose that can reach and spray your garden, then you may not need a watering can.

If your garden is larger than a window sill or balcony, you may want to consider investing in some additional tools. They'll make your garden much more efficient, and you won't have to get your hands quite as dirty as you would without them. These optional – but very helpful – tools include a shovel, a spade, a rake, a hoe, a wheelbarrow, and a weeder, such as a dandelion digger. If you intend to plant trees and shrubs in your garden, you may also want to invest in a branch saw and a pair of pruning shears.

Of course, the bigger your garden, the more tools you may want to consider purchasing. A lot of land could warrant the purchase of a tractor. At that point, you may also want to think about a rototiller, hedge trimmer, and even a chainsaw. These are all expensive pieces of equipment, but again, you don't have to go out and purchase brand new machinery for all of your needs. You might want to consider renting these items or even temporarily hiring help to get you started. Or, you could check garage sales and online selling sites for used equipment within your area. People are almost always selling their gardening or farming equipment, and you might be able to find a good deal on a tractor that's gently used or still running well. Also, check your home improvement stores for sales – around the start and end of the summer season and on select holidays such as Father's Day, they may offer significant discounts on major equipment.

If you'd rather invest your own hard work instead of your money, then feel free to use hand tools such as scythes and bagging hooks to tackle grassy areas. Slashers can be used to extract weeds and brambles, and bill hooks take care of dense vegetation. Again, even these less-expensive alternatives don't necessarily have to be purchased new. Hand tools are especially long-lasting; you may just need to sharpen their blades, but there's really no advantage to purchasing brand new tools versus using hand-me-downs or used equipment acquired through Craigslist, eBay, or a garage sale.

Purchasing your tools is an important primary step in developing your garden, but it's just as crucial to make sure that you care for them properly to extend their longevity as much as possible. Never store tools when they're wet – placing them in a dark, cool shed or garage when they still have moisture on them is a guaranteed way to damage them from rust. You should brush them off thoroughly before storage so that mud, dirt, and other organic material don't stay caked on throughout the months of inactivity. Be sure to oil your metal tools twice per year. Another step that many gardeners overlook is disinfecting their cutting blades. Although it can be a bit time consuming, doing this between each session of work performed on an individual tree or shrub could avoid spreading disease from one plant to another. That way, if, for some reason, one of your plants or shrubs is infected, it will be less likely to wipe out your entire garden.

Sourcing your Seeds and Plants

In order to grow vegetables in your garden, you'll either have to purchase seeds or seedlings. Seedlings are young plants that have essentially already been started for you. While they tend to be more expensive than seeds, and are typically available in fewer varieties, seedlings can help to save time by jump-starting the growing process. This choice is also beneficial and rewarding for a first-time gardener, because you'll already have a head start when you plant your seedling, versus planting a regular seed.

To purchase seedlings, search your grocery and home improvement stores during the late spring. You'll also find a wide variety of seedlings at gardening centers when planting season begins. If you're looking for a larger variety or are just interested in seeing the other types of plants that are out there, consider attending a gardening expo or show if there happens to be one taking place in your area. Sometimes, farmer's markets also offer unique seedlings for planting. Be sure to select plants that are visibly healthy; choose ones that appear sturdy, perky, and vivid in color.

If you choose not to opt for seedlings, you'll simply select seeds instead. You can either choose to purchase seeds that have been conventionally grown, or those that are organic. You'll also choose among hybrid plants (which are marked with the indicator "F1" on the seed packets), or open-pollinated varieties. Typically, hybrid plants grow rather quickly and often yield bountiful harvests. Open-pollinated heirloom varieties are optimized to adapt well with regional soils and weather conditions. Also, seeds from open-pollinated plants can be saved for planting purposes next year.

In terms of conventionally-grown hybrid plants, you'll likely be able to find an adequate variety at garden centers and supermarkets. For more unconventional seeds, check seed catalogs. You can access these online, and usually place your order right from the website, too.

Bushes and trees are often sourced by online or catalog purchase. They can then be delivered to your home on bare root. The only issue with this method of acquiring plants is that they're typically not adapted to your local growing environment, including your soil and perhaps even your climate. Unfortunately, this even holds true at many gardening center chains; plants are shipped in from remote locations and therefore are unfamiliar with local conditions. One

alternative to this dilemma is visiting a local nursery. You may find that they'll be able to tell you which varieties will perform best in your area, and they should be able to sell you the seedlings – or full-grown plants – that will already have adapted to regional conditions. Check your local directory to find a nursery nearby.

One common mistake that beginning gardeners tend to make is assuming that any seed will suffice for planting purposes. While you could certainly plant seeds leftover from your grocery store produce as a fun experiment, you probably won't witness great success. If a plant does grow, it most likely won't look anything like the vegetable from which you acquired the seed. That's because supermarket vegetables are usually hybrids; they are comprised of fruit and vegetable varieties that have been grafted with harder stocks so that they'll survive longer. Most fruits and vegetables that are sold in grocery stores grow from trees or plants that don't perform well in home gardens.

Another option for sourcing plants is to check online to see if there are any seed or plant exchange options in your area. You can search on Craigslist and Freecycle to see if anyone might be selling seeds or plants nearby. Keep in mind, though, that like any purchases made from individual online sellers, there's always a risk factor involved. Such trades rarely come with money-back guarantees, and there's always the possibility that plants acquired from someone else's garden could spread pests in yours.

Growing your Plants from Seeds

One of the most important factors that will determine whether or not your seeds grow successfully is the soil in which you plant them. A common misconception when it comes to soil is that it must be high in nutrients in order for plants to thrive; in reality, though, you don't want the soil to be too nutrient-dense. Seedlings and established plants actually are more dependent on the nutrients in fertile soil, but seeds themselves are typically already equipped with the nutrients they need for sprouting. Thus, any soil that's too fertile could create a breeding ground for fungi, which could harm or even kill your seedlings.

If you're not developing a full-blown survival garden and are only supplementing your grocery shopping to begin with, you can opt for an approach as simple as planting the seeds in sterilized plastic

containers. You may also use homemade paper containers.

If, on the other hand, you're attempting to start a significant amount of seedlings, you may want to opt for the cellular containers used by plant nurseries. Or, you might want to consider planting your seeds in a compressed soil block maker. Otherwise, you'd have to sterilize and fill lots of tiny pots, which could become very time consuming.

You'll notice that your seed packet will feature printed directions about sowing time and planting depth. Make sure to follow these carefully. Don't let your soil dry out too much; that will kill your seedling. If possible, it's best to place your containers directly in water instead of watering from above. That helps to keep the seedling undisturbed yet hydrated. It also allows for the water to be more evenly disbursed. Seeds themselves don't need light in order to sprout, as they are buried under the soil, but seedlings do require a good amount of light. If you neglect to provide enough light for them, they'll still grow tall, but they'll be thin and weak and ultimately won't be able to sustain themselves. This is a common issue that indoor growers run into, so be sure to invest in some grow lights. Even if you place your plants close to your windows, you may still want to provide some artificial light to keep them as healthy as possible.

Sometimes beginning gardeners (and even those who are experienced) make the mistake of sowing seeds too closely together. You'll be able to tell whether or not you've planted them too closely when they begin to sprout. If that's the case, you may need to pinch some of the smaller seedlings off so that the larger ones have adequate space for growing. Also, keep an eye on the roots: if they're filling up their containers but are still not strong enough to go outside, you'll need to replant them in larger containers so that they have enough room to expand. This step usually takes place right after the first pair of true leaves has grown on the seedling. True leaves are different from the first two leaves, or the heart leaves, that develop initially on the seedling. When replanting your seedling, carefully dig out its roots completely and lift it by its true leaves. Never lift a seedling from its stem, or it could break.

If you plan to move your plants outside at some point, it's a good idea to prepare them for the outdoor weather in advance. This

process is sometimes referred to as “hardening.” Two weeks before you’re ready to transplant your seedlings, begin to expose them to outdoor weather on a daily basis in increasing amounts of time. They’ll adjust within this period so that it won’t shock them once they’re transplanted outdoors.

Indoor Gardening

Most plant species require light, and in many cases, they need a significant amount of it. If you plan to grow your plants entirely indoors, or if you’re raising a lot of seedlings through the use of artificial light, you should keep in mind that different types of light can affect certain kinds of plants differently. Not all lights have the same color frequencies, and some plants respond to certain kinds better than others. For instance, blue light typically encourages bushy growth, whereas red lights tend to encourage the development of blooming.

Most home-growers tend to opt for fluorescent grow lights because they’re blue in color and don’t produce a great deal of heat. However, there are also full-spectrum versions of artificial light available today, which allow your plants to receive some red lighting as well. While incandescent light sources tend to be a bit more affordable, they are risky because they can become extremely hot. Thus, they must also be kept away from the plants by at least a few feet.

While nearly all plants need at least some form of light to survive, too much light can be harmful. Thus, you should structure your lighting patterns so that they resemble the natural day/night cycle to some degree, because plants also need darkness to survive. One easy way to tackle this issue is to put your grow lights on an automatic timer. Aim for at least six hours of darkness for each 24-hour cycle.

Keep in mind that what works for one plant won’t necessarily work for another. Each plant has its own unique needs, and some are definitely more difficult to grow than others. Do your research to learn about each plant’s lighting needs. You may have to do a bit of extra work to adjust your timing. For example, perennial plants tend to thrive when exposed to longer periods of darkness; again, though, it depends on each particular species.

Plants also need to be exposed to warmth, but if you're growing your plants indoors, they should do fine within the temperature at which you normally maintain your home. Certain plants do require a winter cycle, though. Certain biennial or perennial species cannot experience a new bloom or fruit until they've gone through a winter cycle. Keep these factors in mind when deciding which types of plants you'll grow indoors.

Weeding your Garden 101

Most gardeners will tell you that weeding is their least favorite aspect of growing their own plants. Unfortunately, though, it's one of those things that has to be done from time to time so that your plants will stay healthy and continue to have plenty of room to grow. Flower gardeners may weed their plots for aesthetic purposes, but if you're growing a survival garden, it becomes a priority and must be completed for some very crucial reasons.

As mentioned in the previous section, plants need light in order to grow to their best potential. They also need space, and nutrients which are found in the soil. Yet, when weeds begin to spring up amongst your plants, they begin to take away a good portion of those resources and use them for themselves. Weeds that grow from most common weeds typically take up a great deal of space, and unfortunately, they will often grow at a much quicker pace than the rest of your garden plants. As long as you stop them in their tracks, though, you'll be able to sustain your vegetables and keep them healthy.

If spending an afternoon weeding the garden sounds absolutely dreadful to you, keep in mind that there will eventually be an upside to the whole dilemma; that is, once your plants are mature, they can typically withstand a reasonable amount of competition from surrounding weeds. With that being said, you shouldn't allow your weeds to grow so out of control that you're struggling to find your plants, but if you have a few small weeds poking through here and there while your plants are in their fruiting stages, you should be fine. More than anything, weeds can be an eyesore. If that doesn't bother you, though, just be sure to keep your seedlings weed-free; after that, you have a bit of leeway when it comes to letting weeds go for a while.

Tips and Tricks for Composting

By now, you know that the fertility of your soil is an important aspect of growing a healthy survival garden. Taking care of your soil is the practice that has the potential to carry your garden years into the future, ensuring that you have a healthy environment in which plants can thrive and produce beautiful, bountiful harvests for you and your family.

Healthy soil should be packed with nutrients and tiny organisms that assist in the hydration and aeration processes, which your plants need in order to survive. Good, hearty soil will also promote your plants' ability to absorb nutrients. While there are myriad ways in which you can ensure healthy soil, one of the most affordable and survivalist-friendly means of enhancing your soil content is by incorporating decomposed organic matter, also known as compost.

Some expert-level gardeners get very particular about their composting practice, and in truth, it can get quite complex if you choose to go that route. Nonetheless, the basics are easy to grasp. Eventually, all organic matter must rot, and when it does, it breaks down and releases nutrients into its surroundings. You can use certain tactics to prevent a foul odor from your rotting organic material, and there are also ways in which you can attempt to speed up the rotting process; but, the good news is that there is very little you can do incorrectly when it comes to composting. In fact, if you were to gather a pile of dead plants, food scraps, and any other organic material and place it in your back yard right now, it would eventually form compost. While that's the simplest approach you can take in creating a compost pile, you may want to consider a few additional factors to optimize the process and ensure a healthy, hearty soil for your next sowing season.

Air

If you do choose to strategically create a compost pile that will benefit your garden as much as possible, then you should attempt to get a good air flow going throughout your compost. You can achieve this by turning your pile with a fork every now and then, especially as you begin to approach the sowing season. Or, you could simply avoid

packing your compost too tightly. When you pack your compost loosely, you'll create air pockets, which helps to ensure that you won't get a strong foul odor emanating from your garden. Choose items of different sizes, such as large, textured pieces, to help create air pockets.

Water

While you don't want to saturate your compost pile, you should make sure that it has enough moisture so that the rotting process can take place effectively. Otherwise, the compost will dry out significantly and the rotting process will take longer to occur. Keep it moist, but avoid letting it sit soaking wet, or the water will rob the compost pile of the air that it needs.

Temperature

This is a matter that serious gardeners tend to focus on, but beginners shouldn't spend too much time worrying about temperature. In fact, it's really not necessary to try to regulate the temperature of your compost pile. Even though the compost process slows down when the temperature drops, it picks right back up when the air warms up again. If you're just starting out with gardening or if you don't want to be bothered by worrying about temperature, you can simply skip this aspect of the process. If, however, you live in a climate where you can plant outdoors year round, you may want to compost twice per year; we'll discuss that in greater detail soon.

Carbon and Nitrogen

To develop the ideal compost, you should aim for a three-to-one ratio of high-carbon material to nitrogen-rich material. If you want to go the extra step, you can do a bit of research here to chemically analyze the composition of different types of material, but that's certainly not essential. A good rule of thumb to remember is that carbon-rich material tends to be dry and brown, while nitrogen-rich material is green and/or moist. You should organize these materials in layers, and use three times as much dry or brown material as green or moist material.

Some good examples of brown and dry, or high-carbon materials, are dried leaves, wood and bark chips that are finely chopped, sawdust, straw, and shredded newspaper. Make sure that if

you select to use sawdust or any other kind of wood, that you're using materials from wood that hasn't been processed.

Green, or nitrogen-rich materials, include eggshells, coffee grounds, fruit scraps, vegetable scraps, and grass or plant clippings.

Despite what you may have heard, it's never a good idea to use animal feces in your compost. Soils that contain manure content have been strategically formulated; leave that to the professionals. Also, you should avoid using fruit pits, anything containing meat, oil, fat, grease, or dairy, unless you are composting in a closed area where animals won't be able to access it. Although grass and plant clippings are a good idea to include for nitrogen-rich materials in your compost pile, be sure to avoid any material from weeds – they'll likely wind up taking over! Make sure that you also avoid using any plant material that has could be carrying diseases.

If you do choose to use animal products in your compost, be sure to bury them well beneath the soil. You can dig a hole wherever you need the nutrients most, and in a place where you won't be digging the soil up again too soon in the near future. Then, refill the hole with soil to mask the odor so that animals won't come and disturb the pile.

Some serious gardeners choose to invest in a compost tumbler. This allows you to aerate your compost and retain heat to speed up the process, while simultaneously keeping rats, flies, and other critters away. If you choose to create your compost on a smaller scale, you could always create a small, simple worm composting bin. To start, find (or purchase) some red composting worms, and just feed them your kitchen scraps. They can even live under your sink comfortably and without causing any odors.

Cold Composting vs. Hot Composting

From time to time, you may hear seasoned gardeners refer to either "cold composting" or "hot composting." The primary difference is that the hot composting takes into consideration the carbon and nitrogen content of the composting materials, as discussed previously. Cold composting is a much simpler approach, and if you feel a bit overwhelmed with where to begin when it comes to composting, then

it's an ideal choice for you. Many beginning gardeners go this route due to its simplicity. Instead of factoring in nitrogen-rich and high-carbon materials, you can simply collect whatever yard waste or organic materials you have on hand and pile them up; that's cold composting. (Again, though, be sure to avoid any weeds or diseased plant matter.) This approach requires little thought and effort, and will still yield the decomposition results you're looking for over the course of about a year.

Timing

The time when you choose to add compost to your garden will depend on whether or not you choose to garden year-round. If your survival garden is located outdoors and you live in a climate that experiences all four seasons, then the ideal time for composting is in the fall.

Choose to layer your compost on empty beds in the fall months before the ground has frozen. It will decompose for the winter, leaving your spring soil nutrient-rich and ready for planting.

If you live in a warmer climate where you can garden year-round outdoors, then you may want to consider composting twice per year. This will allow your garden to accommodate the two distinct growing seasons – one cool and one very warm – through the planting of different herbs, vegetables, and flowers that will thrive better in one or the other.

Due to the fact that the ground doesn't freeze in warmer climates, the composting process takes place at a much quicker rate than it does in cooler areas. The soil microbes in warmer locations work year-round, which means that they use up the organic matter faster. Thus, you don't have to allow your compost to sit and decompose for nearly as long as you would in a cooler climate.

In warmer climates, the cool growing season lasts from about mid-September through April. The best time to lay compost to prepare for this season is in late August or early September.

The warmer season may overlap with the ongoing cool-season

growth period, but you can still choose to compost other areas that aren't taken up by your cool-season plants. The warm season tends to begin in mid-February or March, so plan to lay your compost a few weeks before that time. The warm-season plants will continue to grow through the summer months.

If you live in a warm climate but choose not to plant during the summer months, you can still take advantage of the intense summer heat by composting during this time. Spread it out generously and allow it to cover the fallow soil. This will help to prevent weed growth, maintain moisture, and reduce soil erosion.

Additional Composting Tips

Again, composting tends to be a process in which you can't really go wrong, but if you're looking to maximize your efforts, it helps to bear a few simple tips in mind.

The areas where your soil is light-colored and dry are the spots that will benefit most from composting. That's because those areas are most likely lower in organic matter; whereas areas that have dark brown or black soil are nutrient-rich and dense with organic matter.

For light-brown soil, consider adding approximately four to six inches of compost prior to each composting season. For areas where the soil is darker in color, about one to three inches of organic material will suffice.

Typically, most of the vegetables that you'll plant in your garden will have roots that only penetrate the top 12 inches of the soil. It's wise to loosen the soil a bit so that the root system can spread with ease and move about to find nutrients and moisture. If your soil is too compacted, you may want to consider loosening your garden by digging about 12 inches down. From there, you can layer your compost on top of the soil and turn it under to a depth of six to 12 inches or so.

Like many other aspects of gardening, composting is a process that varies from one person to the next. Ultimately, you can determine how much (or how little) effort you're willing to put into composting.

Even if you just create a cold compost pile and let it sit through the winter, you'll still be ahead of the game when planting time comes in the spring. No matter which route you choose to go, you should probably complete some form of composting, because it will make your garden healthy and stable during the growing season. Don't feel pressured to develop an elaborate composting scheme after your first harvest, though. Play around and see what works best for you and make adjustments in future seasons as needed. Even though some gardeners approach it as an exact science, it doesn't necessarily have to be done that way.

Saving Your Seeds

As we discussed earlier in this guide, there are two main types of plants that reproduce through the use of seeds: hybrids and open-pollinated plants. Just as a refresher: hybrids are created as the offspring of two different varieties of a single plant. Similar to animal hybrids, the seeds of some hybrid plants are sometimes sterile. Even if they aren't sterile, the plants they produce will often be quite different from the parent plants.

Open-pollinated plants, on the other hand, are stable varieties. They are created as a result of pollination that takes place between two genetically-similar parent plants. Open-pollinated plants tend to be fertile, and their offspring typically bears a strong resemblance to them. If you want to save your seeds from your crops to replant them again in the next season, you're better off saving seeds from open-pollinated plants, versus hybrid varieties.

Certain seeds are easy to store and save; whereas others require a bit more work. Sometimes, plants will cross-pollinate easily with similar varieties. Taking this approach to gardening allows you to play around and even perhaps create a new variety on your own. Yet, if you want to create the same exact variety next year, it may not work out as well. Some plants also present difficulties because they don't produce any seeds at all during their first year. Thus, you'd have to allow them to take the time and space needed to develop flowers during their second year of growth in order to collect any seeds from them.

Still, saving seeds can be a beneficial practice because it allows you to save money. Also, in terms of taking a survivalist approach to gardening, it gives the gardener even more control to be wholly self-sufficient, nearly eliminating the need for outside resources altogether. Even beginning gardeners can save seeds – it just takes a little bit of know-how.

Beans and peas are perhaps the easiest vegetables from which seeds can be extracted and saved. Simply leave the pods untouched on a healthy, typical plant until it dries and browns. Do not pick it – that's a common mistake that beginners make. Wait until the pod is

fully dried out. If you're approaching a late point in the season and there's a risk for frost, simply extract the entire plant and let it hang upside-down in a dry environment. After the pod has dried completely, you can open it and extract the seeds. Just keep them in a dry place until you're ready to use them for the next sowing season!

Lettuce seeds are another beginner-friendly seed that can be saved with ease. Lettuce plants house their seeds in small pods that are left on the plant after it has bloomed. If you wish to save your lettuce seeds, you'll have to leave it in the ground instead of extracting it and planting something else in its place. Yet, it's very easy to extract the seeds, and all you have to do is allow the pods to dry out completely. Like the pepper seeds, you can empty the pods once they're fully dried and store the extracted seeds in a dry place until they're ready to be planted.

Peppers are another simple seed-saving plant. After a pepper has changed its color completely, indicating total ripeness, you can cut the pepper open and scrape out the seeds. Place them on a plate and allow them to dry out in a non-humid environment, preferably in the shade. Test their hardness from time to time – they should be dry enough so that they snap or break instead of bending.

Many gardeners find that it's easiest to dry seeds out on a glass or ceramic plate – skip paper or plastic. For best results, spread the seeds out evenly across the surface of the plate. To keep them from clumping together, stir them twice per day. Never attempt to dry seeds of any variety on a paper towel; they'll only wind up sticking. If you have a food dehydrator, you can set it to 85 degrees and set the seeds in there until they are fully dried. Don't try to place them in a warm oven; any environment that exceeds 95 degrees will be too hot.

Saving tomatoes is another great option if you want to avoid purchasing new seeds. It's a bit more of an involved and time-consuming process, but if you want to try something new, then it can be a fun way to test the waters when it comes to replanting seeds. To start, pick ripe tomatoes from different vines (all of the same variety) and cut each tomato across the middle. Gently squeeze the juice, along with the seeds, directly into a bowl. You'll notice that the seeds will be encased in a gelatinous coating. This coating is designed to prevent the seed from sprouting right inside the tomato. In order to

remove the coating, you'll need to ferment it. The fermentation mimics the natural rot that the fruit goes through, and it can also kill any seed-borne plant disease that could potentially affect your crop for the upcoming year.

To ferment your tomato seeds, incorporate a small amount of water (about half as much water as there is tomato juice) into the bowl. Allow it to sit for a period of up to three days, and stir it twice daily. Watch your mixture closely, especially if you've placed it in a warm environment. Fermentation tends to occur at a faster pace in higher temperatures. As the seeds ferment, the mixture will become covered in a white or grayish mold – this is normal. Avoid storing the bowl in any area that children or animals could get into it, and keep it out of the kitchen. The stench will become quite powerful, but it's a normal part of the fermenting process.

Once you see bubbles rising to the top of the mixture, or a very thick coat of mold has formed overtop, you are ready to stop the fermentation. To do this, add enough water to double the solution, and stir well. This will cause the clean, useable seeds to settle beneath the solution, at the very bottom of the bowl. Carefully pour off the mold, excess debris, and any hollow seeds that can't be used. Again, incorporate additional water and repeat the process until you're left with only clean seeds.

To capture just the seeds, you can pour the liquid through a strainer. Wipe the bottom of the strainer with a towel to get rid of as much moisture as possible. Then, dump your tomato seeds onto a plate (again, glass or ceramic), where they will dry. Stir the seeds twice per day to keep them from clumping together. Tomato seeds are especially prone to germination if not dried quickly, so in order to speed up the drying process, consider using a fan. Just don't place them inside an oven or in direct sunlight.

Winter squash seeds can also be saved for replanting. Extract the seeds from a ripe winter squash by sticking a knife into the vegetable so that it just penetrates the flesh. Move the knife around the circumference of the squash – you don't want to stick it too far in, or you'll cut through the seeds. Don't just cut straight through the center of the vegetable. Once you've made it around the circumference, extract the seeds from their fibers, then rinse and dry

them using the same process listed above for the other seeds.

Salvaging seeds from summer squashes is just as easy – just make sure that the vegetable is completely ripe before you attempt to extract the seeds. You must allow the squash to ripen past the tender stage; when you can no longer dent the skin with your fingernail, it's ready for you to extract the seeds from it. Use the same method as the winter squash.

You can save seeds from cucumbers, too. After they've ripened fully, they change color and become softer. Pick your cucumber for seed saving towards the end of the season, not the beginning, because cucumber vines stop producing new fruit once you stop picking them.

To extract cucumber seeds, cut the ripe cucumber in half and scrape its seeds directly into a bowl. You'll then need to remove the seeds' coating, which you can do by carefully rubbing them around the inside of a sieve as you rinse them. Or, you can just allow them to soak in a bit of water for two days. Rinse and let them dry completely.

Another common crop for seed saving is an eggplant. You won't be able to eat the eggplant from which you save your seeds, so be sure to select one that you know you won't need for food. You'll have to let the eggplant ripen past the point at which you'd pick it for eating, because the seeds from a table-ready eggplant would be too immature. Keep the fruit on the plant until it's passed the purple stage and transitions to a dull, brownish color. Green varieties will over-ripen to a yellowish/light green color, and white varieties should turn golden. You'll know that an eggplant is ready for seed-saving if it's off-color, dull, hard, and perhaps even a bit shriveled.

To extract eggplant seeds, cut the ripe fruit in half and remove the flesh from the seeded area. If your goal is to save a good amount of seeds (rather than just a few), consider using a food processor or blender to process the flesh so that the seeds will be easier to extract. Then, put the pulp in a bowl and add water. Allow the good seeds to settle, then pour off excess water and pulp. You can use a fine mesh strainer to catch the small seeds. Use a towel to thoroughly dry the bottom of the strainer and absorb excess moisture. Then, dump the seeds out onto a glass or ceramic plate to dry.

Although the seed saving process requires a bit of extra work, you'll save some money and have the satisfaction of knowing exactly where your seeds came from when you plant your crops next year.

Gardening All Year Round

The traditional gardening approach is designed to produce crops for the summer harvest. As autumn approaches, the days become shorter, colder, and darker. There's less sunlight and warmth, so annual plants die down. In most cases, and especially in areas that experience significant seasonal shifts, the gardener hibernates throughout the winter and looks forward to the springtime for next year's crop.

Many gardeners who find themselves living in northern areas have a more difficult time growing food all-year round, but that doesn't mean that they absolutely can't harvest throughout the winter months. If your goal is to have access to fresh, home-grown food all year round, then you can still achieve it by sowing all year-round, and taking a few extra precautions to beat the cold winter blasts. Year-round gardening is an especially important skill for the survival gardener who hopes to produce a garden hardy enough to outlast a 12-month cycle.

The key to achieving this coveted practice is to overwinter your plants. If they are grown strong enough before winter approaches, it's quite possible that they'll make it through the harsh winter weather. Of course, there are a few different steps you'll have to take to ensure that the process is successful.

For one thing, the autumn crops must be sown in the summertime. Although this is the traditionally the time in which conventional gardeners are watching as their gardens flourish and bloom, the four-season gardener has to continue with prep work. Thus, you'll have to plan for adequate space in your garden if you intend to have both summer and autumn or winter crops. Autumn crops include winter squash, pumpkins, and shelling beans. In addition, there are some crops that grow well in the early summer but can also thrive during the autumn months. For instance, artichokes, beets, turnips, carrots, and parsnips all do well in either season. Celeriac, potatoes, spinach, and arugula can also be planted for an autumn harvest.

There are also foods that tend to do well only during the

autumn, and have the potential to outlast frosts and even yield a bountiful harvest into the early spring. These plants include cabbage, Chinese cabbage, lamb's lettuce, rutabagas, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, and fennel.

Even some spring and summertime bloomers require work during the fall months. For instance, garlic, early cropping broad beans, early cropping peas, and certain types of onions must be sown and planted in the fall to ensure a proper harvest time. As you can see, it's easy for gardening to become a four-season, full-time responsibility.

Keeping your Plants Free from Frost and Snow

Even if you live in an area that typically sees snowfall during the winter months, the plants mentioned above can still thrive throughout the winter. In fact, they might even do well in a bed of insulating snow and could potentially perform even better with the precipitation, versus having to endure a winter that's both cold and dry.

With that being said, it's still a good idea to treat your overwintered plants with some level of protection. Harsh blizzards and ice are likely to cause damage to even the hardiest of plants, and they still need a certain degree of heat to be able to make it through the winter. Moreover, using a covering to block out snow and other precipitation could make it easier for you to harvest your crops as the winter goes on. A greenhouse is obviously the ideal solution here, but even if you don't have access to one, there are still many other alternate measures you can take to ensure that your plants will stay healthy as the temperature drops.

Row Covers

Using row covers is the simplest means for protecting plants, but when used properly, this method can help to moderate the temperature somewhat and block out harsh winds.

Typically, row covers are made from lightweight, permeable material. Polyester and polypropylene are two of the most common materials used for row covers. Row covers can be arranged by being

placed loosely overtop your plants and then secured using rocks or stones. You can also support them with the use of wire hoops. There are different varieties of row covers available, each of which provides a specific degree of frost protection.

For one, floating row covers are extremely lightweight. They are designed to allow a significant amount of ambient light – 85 percent – to pass through. They're also highly breathable to allow air and water to pass through. While they're not typically an optimal choice for blocking out harsh temperatures and heavy snowfall, they're ideal for blocking out pests.

Floating row covers work well for plants that are in the younger stages, or even beds that have only recently been seeded. As long as you leave enough slack in the material to allow adequate room for growth, the plants will still thrive. Just make sure that you either bury the edges in the soil or pin them down securely through the use of rocks, stones, bricks, or some other sealing factor. This step is especially important if you're trying to block out pests.

Certain crops thrive when you leave them covered all seasons. Carrots and onions, for example, will grow well even if you keep them covered throughout the season. Other crops, such as beans and cabbage, should be uncovered once the plants are well-grown, or the threat from the pests has passed. Certain plants that require pollination must be kept uncovered when they start to flower; or, if you're an advanced gardener, you can perform hand pollination at this stage. In climates where the temperature gets too hot, you may have to keep the covers off in order to prevent excess heat buildup.

Some gardeners prefer to use heavier covers to provide a higher level of protection against harsh winter conditions. Heavier covers can provide as much as eight degrees of frost protection. With that being said, they also tend to block out the sunlight, so the plants that you cover with heavier material may grow at a slower pace. If you're looking for added protection but only have lightweight covers on hand, you could always consider doubling up the layers of lightweight material to get the similar effect you'd achieve by using a heavier material.

In addition to polyester or polypropylene row covers, there are also row covers made of plastic available for purchase. This is typically a good option for advanced gardeners and farmers, because this method requires a significant amount of careful attention. The plastic can drastically alter the temperature of the plants beneath it – in some cases, by up to 30 degrees. To make sure that your plants don't get too warm, you might have to vent them on warm days, and reclose the covers at night. Slitting the plastic rows tends to solve the problem of having to vent the plants during the day, but as a result, the harsher temperatures would then be able to creep in at night.

Gardeners who are growing plants in particularly warm climates might consider using colored or shaded plastic covers. The coloring can be strategically used to deflect some of the sunlight, which can reduce the temperature inside the tunnel. You can use plastic row covers by securing them with metal, wire, plastic, or wooden hoops. This will prevent the plastic from injuring the plants or hindering growth. Be sure to anchor the row cover edges in the ground securely by using pipes, boards, soil, or a similar method.

Working with row covers can present difficulties from time to time. Lightweight fabric is especially likely to blow around while you try to work with it, even if there's only a small breeze. You'll also find that the fabric tends to tear quite easily if you get it caught on sharp edges. Nonetheless, with a little patience and enough practice, you'll learn how to handle row covers carefully and efficiently.

Here are a few other tips you might want to keep in mind while working with row covers:

Although row covers are sometimes sold in smaller pieces (which makes them a bit more manageable), you'll get a better value if you choose to purchase a larger roll and cut pieces as needed.

Many gardeners tend to use rocks, stones, or soil to anchor row covers. It's a simple and quick way to keep the row covers in place, but if you're not careful, you could also find yourself tearing the fabric quite easily. As an alternative, consider using plastic soda bottles that are partially filled with water as weights. Or, consider creating makeshift "sandbags" by partially filling plastic shopping bags with

soil.

Don't be afraid to try using wire hoops. They're available for purchase at most garden supply stores, or you can make your own by using 9-gauge wire. Using wire hoops is one of the most efficient methods of keeping fabric or plastic in place.

If you plan to reuse your row covers, make sure that they are completely free of dirt and other debris at the end of the season. Roll them or fold them gently, and store them in a plastic storage bin throughout the winter. Keep them outdoors or in a shed so that they won't get too hot. To keep the lid down and to prevent the bin from blowing away, keep a heavy rock or bricks on top.

You don't have to throw away a row cover just because it has holes or is torn in several places. Instead, cut it up and use it to patch the row covers you have in place as needed. You can use waxed dental floss to "sew" on the patches.

If you're working with upright plants but still want to protect them using row covers, consider placing a tomato cage around the plant. Then, wrap the row cover around the cage, and pin it in place using clothespins.

Cold Frames

If row covers sound like too much work to you, you might want to consider using a cold frame. Although building a cold frame tends to require a bit of work initially, the only thing you need to do in order to regulate the temperature inside is lift the lid if it gets too warm. This method is particularly effective for overwintering salad leaves.

Cold frames allow you to keep your produce growing even after frosts occur by allowing your plants to have sufficient protection from harsh conditions. All you need to construct a cold frame is a structure with four walls, and a transparent lid. The walls are used to block wind, snow, ice, and cold air, while simultaneously keeping heat and shelter inside. The lid allows light to come through. Essentially, a cold frame resembles a mini-greenhouse.

You can get pretty creative when it comes to making your own cold frame. Any type of sturdy material will work – think plywood, concrete, or even hay bales. The most efficient way to construct a lid is to use an old window; but of course, not everyone has one of those lying around. Tacking Plexiglas or plastic sheeting to your frame works just as well.

The dimensions of your cold frame will largely be determined by the size of your lid. With that being said, you shouldn't exceed a space of three by six feet for a single cold frame, but in order for your efforts to be worthwhile, you might want to opt for a space that's at least two by four feet. A good trick to employ while building your cold frame is raising the back wall about four to six inches higher than the front wall. Not only will this maximize the amount of light that reaches the plants inside the cold frame, but it will also allow any rain or snowfall to roll off with ease.

To get the best results from your cold frame, consider constructing it in a south-facing space that receives bountiful sunlight. If possible, place it someplace where there's sufficient drainage and at least minimal protection from the wind. In the best case scenario, your cold frame should experience full sun from midmorning to midafternoon. You can choose to use a cold frame only as needed throughout the winter months; or, you can designate a specific spot within your garden and keep your cold frame there permanently.

Prior to constructing a permanent cold frame, remove the top three or four inches of soil in the designated area for your frame and replace it with one layer of coarse gravel. Then, put about six inches of topsoil back on top. This will promote a healthy drainage system.

You can choose to use pots or flats in your cold frame if you're growing more than one type of plant. If you're only going to stick with a single variety throughout your whole cold frame, you can choose to plant directly in the soil.

Like many aspects of gardening, temperature will play a role in the success of your cold frame. To make sure that the plants in your cold frame are staying healthy, the trick is to let the air inside get a

little cool, instead of striving for warm conditions. For summer plants, you'll want the temperature inside the cold frame to stay below 75 degrees, and not below 60 for plants that grow during the winter and fall. If you need to cool things off, just lift the lid.

A good rule to remember is that you should prop the lid open about six inches if it's warmer than 40 degrees outside. If it's above 50, remove the lid completely; just don't forget to put the lid back on before the temperature drops at night.

On particularly chilly nights, you might want to consider taking an extra step to ensure the fact that your plants stay warm enough to keep from freezing. Because most of the heat tends to escape from the glass on top (as opposed to the surrounding walls), your best course of action would be to pile insulation on top of the lid. Don't use anything too heavy, but opt for materials like newspaper, straw, or old blankets. While snow does actually act as a good insulator, you won't want to keep heavy snow on top of the fragile glass; be sure to brush it off as soon as you can.

Plastic Tunnels

Plastic tunnels are very similar to row covers in the fact that you can choose to purchase heavy-duty varieties or use those that are lightweight and more permeable. They can be as elaborate as walk-in polytunnels to a more fixed version of the row cover. Although they're a cheaper alternative to the cold frame, they tend to be a bit flimsier and won't provide the same level of protection.

If desired, you can create your own plastic tunnels using a series of hoops made from reinforcing wire, rolled plastic, and two ten-foot 2 x 4s. You'll also need a means by which you can fasten the plastic to the wood. Simply structure the wire hoops around the edge of the row of plants you're working with, then carefully lay the plastic overtop. Lay a 2 x 4 on each side of the row to secure the plastic, and lay a series of cords atop the plastic from one 2 x 4 to the other (essentially going up and over the row of plants). Fasten the cords using drywall screws or your preferred method of choice. Be sure to secure the openings at the end, too, using bricks, rocks, or large stones.

If you're constructing a four-season garden, any of the options mentioned above can help to protect against the harsh weather during the colder months. Having some form of protection in place is far more preferable than leaving your garden out in the open to fend for its own when the weather gets cold. To achieve added protection, consider doubling up on a couple of different methods; for example, you might want to construct row covers inside your cold frame on frigid nights. Just be sure to keep an eye on the temperature so that your plants don't get too warm during the day time. It's wise to invest in a small thermometer so that you can check on your plants from time to time without having to guess.

Additional Advice for Four-Season Gardeners

Four-season gardening is by far much more challenging than gardening in one season alone. Not only is there added work, meaning that the four-season gardener never truly gets any time of rest away from their crops, but there are more factors that could lead to problematic circumstances, especially when gardening in a temperate climate. In truth, there's a chance that a garden grown in the autumn or winter months within a cooler region might fail. While it's difficult not to become disheartened by a garden that succumbs to harsh weather, it's best to keep your head up and know that even if you've done everything to protect your garden, there are no tools or tricks that will completely ensure its livelihood throughout the winter.

Gardening is one field in which there seems to be endless sources of conflicting advice. While experienced gardeners might have a thorough understanding of what works best for them, there is no secret formula for developing the four-season garden that will thrive for everyone; there are too many variables in the equation. Regional climate, soil type, and specificity in terms of different strains will all play a role in how each individual plant might perform in a person's garden. What works for you may not work for another.

The key factors to pay attention to when it comes to developing a four-season garden unique to you needs are soil composition, first and last frost dates for the season, and which plants are known to perform best in your region. It's also a good idea to find out the amount of time it takes for each species of plant to live its full cycle from sowing to harvest. You must use that amount of time to gauge when you should sow your seeds – it has to be at least that amount of

time before the first frost, at the very latest. Otherwise, it's possible that they could thrive in the late summer warmth but then struggle when it's time to bloom as winter moves in, even if you take special actions to protect against the cold.

Gardening and Animals

The practice of caring for animals can range from intricate, time-consuming labor, to simpler approaches that require little work. Raising an entire herd of buffalo or cows, for example, would require a serious investment of time and hard work, and you'd have to do a great deal of learning, including adopting new skills, in order for your investments to be worthwhile. Nonetheless, even beginning survival gardeners can reap the benefits of branching out in to the animal kingdom.

Depending on your needs and desires, you may have to do a considerable amount of research to find out what you can and can't do when it comes to raising animals. For instance, it's illegal to slaughter your own animals at home in most places if you intend to feed anyone besides your own family members. In some places, it's completely illegal to slaughter animals at home under any circumstances. Thus, if you do intend to raise animals for meat, you'll have to think ahead to take into consideration how you'd process them when the time comes.

There are many options you can consider when it comes to raising animals to benefit your survival plan, or your farm or garden in general. Read through some of the most common options below to consider whether bringing animals into your Gardening Plan might be right for you.

Bees

As you probably already know, bees produce honey and beeswax. Organic honey is becoming wildly popular as a health food, and it has many properties from which the human body benefits tremendously. Beeswax can be repurposed for innumerable uses, including lip balm, skin moisturizer, cooking, and most commonly, candles. It's also used in a number of cosmetic products.

With the movement towards organic products that's taken hold across the globe in recent years, raising bees has the potential not only to become a healthy alternative to using processed products containing honey and beeswax for you and your family members, but it could also become lucrative if you decide to sell your bees' organic

products.

Of course, if you are allergic to bee stings, raising bees is certainly not a good option for you. If, however, you seem to have no allergies to bees, then it might be an option you'd want to consider. The initial costs of raising bees tend to be relatively low. You'll need to purchase certain supplies up front, such as a hive and its accompanying materials, as well as extracting equipment and proper clothing. Some retailers and online sellers offer starter kits, which contain boxes, bees, and necessary equipment for one combined price, which is ideal for beginners.

A honeybee's life cycle typically spans the course of about six weeks. In that time, it can produce up to one-twelfth of a teaspoon of honey. This may not seem like a significant amount, but if you're raising a colony of thousands of honeybees, the honey can quickly add up.

Bees are also responsible for pollination; thus, your garden can benefit tremendously if you choose to raise bees. In addition, bees are largely self-sufficient; aside from startup labor and costs, the only investment you'll really need to make is in terms of time. You'll need to dedicate about a half hour each week for beekeeping, and the honey collecting process needs to be done twice per year.

As with any other animal-raising endeavor, it's important to check your local laws and ordinances when it comes to raising bees. Also, location is important for raising bees, as they don't like extreme temperatures. They can't survive in freezing temperatures, and high winds are harmful to them as well. Honeybees require sunlight and access to water, as well as nectar, which they use for food.

Even if you live in an urban area, you might be able to convince your council to invest in a beehive. Bees benefit the population by pollinating plants, and although they often carry a bad reputation because of their stingers, they are actually more docile than most people realize. In addition, the world is currently experiencing a serious shortage in terms of bee population, so whether you choose to raise bees on your own or you are able to convince the leaders in your area to invest in beekeeping, you'll be doing the world a significant

favor.

Birds for Eggs and Poultry

If you're considering raising some feathered friends, you could be investing in a regular source of fresh, organic eggs, and poultry to feed you and your family.

Chickens

Raising chickens is relatively easy, and many beginners opt to go this route in order to access a regular supply of fresh eggs. If you want to give it a try, you'll first need to make sure that you have adequate space. A full-sized chicken run is best, but if you don't have room for that, you can build a portable pen (also known as a chicken tractor) to keep your chickens contained. That option also lets you move them around as needed.

Make sure that you can keep your chickens protected from predators by building a sturdy fence. You can either build a chicken coop of your own or purchase one that's premade. If you have little experience with carpentry, then purchasing a premade coop is recommended; it will likely save you a great deal of time, and probably a bit of money, too. With that being said, if you have some construction experience, you can research plans for chicken coops online. Just be sure to weigh the costs of lumber and other supplies (as well as your time) against the price of a premade coop.

It's a good idea to become familiar with someone in your area who raises chickens themselves. He or she will be able to detail the ins and outs of what you can expect when raising chickens in your area. If you don't know of anyone around, check to see if your area has a 4H Club, or speak with the retailer from whom you purchase your chicks. Knowing that there's a person within the area who you can reach out to if you have any questions could prove to be helpful when you find yourself in an unfamiliar situation with your chickens.

In most areas, roosters are illegal due to the tremendous amount of noise they produce. Check your local codes to find out if they're legal or not; although, if you enjoy your peace and quiet, you probably won't want one anyway. If you find that you do have a

rooster in your flock (a surprise that tends to happen quite frequently), make sure that you have an out for it. In some cases, farmers will be willing take roosters off your hands.

One of the most frustrating aspects of raising chickens is trying to determine when they'll lay their eggs. Despite what the experts might tell you, many individuals who raise chickens soon find that there seems to be no apparent rhyme or reason as to when chickens lay their eggs. Even if a specific breed is scheduled to begin laying eggs within a certain time frame, you may find yourself waiting two additional months before the eggs start coming. You might find that a chicken will lay her eggs like clockwork for a month straight, then take a break, then begin to lay eggs every other day. The trick is to not set stringent expectations when it comes to raising chickens.

With that being said, you can boost your odds for receiving regular eggs if you make sure to care for your chickens properly and on a regular schedule. Choose high-quality, whole-grain food (or whichever type is recommended for your particular species), and make sure to give them enough water.

The experience of raising chickens can be interesting and at times, frustrating, but many farmers will tell you that the fresh eggs make the experience wholly worthwhile. Fresh eggs, in most individuals' opinions, are much tastier in contrast to the store-bought variety. Plus, ensuring that you're growing organic food, and that you'll have a supply of eggs in the event of a disaster or food shortage, is great for your peace of mind, too.

Ducks

If you're new to raising fowl, you may not want to start out with ducks right away. Although they don't tend to fight with one another in the same way that chickens do, ducks tend to require a bit more care than chickens. With that being said, many experts say that you can actually raise ducks and chickens side by side – with great success – if done right.

Typically, the ducks you purchase at a farm supply retailer won't be able to fly. They were bred to be heavier, so that they can't fly away from their farms. Nonetheless, they still need to be secured

(like chickens) so that predators can't get to them. They are resilient in cold temperatures, so you don't have to worry too much about providing heavy shelter. When it comes to constructing a run or pen, make sure that you have at least four square feet of space for each duck. Don't be surprised, though, if you find that your ducks tend to prefer the outdoors; they'll only spend a few waking hours indoors, and they enjoy being outside in the rain and snow.

A layer of straw can act as adequate bedding for a duck. Be sure to change it regularly, and especially if it's wet. You can also construct a nesting box, which should be about 16 inches square, and be sure to fill it with straw. Don't get discouraged if they don't use it; ducks typically aren't concerned with privacy.

You don't necessarily have to have a pond for your ducks, but you do need some form of water in which they can dunk their heads and submerge their bodies. This is necessary for their oil glands to be activated; they need to splash water onto their backs to evenly distribute their oils.

Because ducks require more niacin than chickens, you can usually get away with feeding them chicken layer food that's enriched with brewer's yeast. Add it in using a five percent ratio. Grown ducks will eat about four to six ounces of feed per day, and they also need plenty of water nearby. They also benefit from eating leafy greens, such as lettuce and Swiss chard.

Although raising ducks is a bit more involved than raising chickens alone, their eggs have a higher concentration of nutrients than chicken's eggs. Many people also feel that duck eggs are tastier than chicken eggs, but the higher content of protein, iron, calcium, potassium, and other beneficial nutrients is reason enough to consider raising ducks. Also, ducks tend to maintain regular patterns when laying eggs; most farmers find that their ducks lay one egg every day consistently.

Turkey and Geese

For the experienced farmer who has already had experience in raising smaller fowl, the prospect of raising turkey or geese can be promising. With that being said, it's recommended that beginning

gardeners shy away from these two types of birds. While many farmers choose to raise these birds for slaughter, there are some difficulties involved that might deter beginners.

For one thing, geese are loud and apt to snap at humans when approached. They act as guard dogs for the farm – which can be either advantageous or problematic, depending on the situation. Also, geese are notoriously aggressive during their breeding seasons, and some of them will go after other smaller types of birds, such as chickens and ducks.

If you've had practice with chickens and ducks and you're up for the challenge of raising geese, then there are some worthwhile benefits to consider. Aside from being a source of meat, geese produce large edible eggs that are packed with nutrients. They can also help keep your weed population under control. Some goose breeds are more docile than others, so if you're considering raising geese, you may want to opt for a breed that's less aggressive. American Buffs and Cotton Patch Geese tend to have milder temperaments than other species. Some species, such as Chinese geese, are also said to be better egg layers than others. Do thorough research ahead of time to find out which species will be best suited for your needs and regional conditions.

Raising turkeys presents its own set of challenges. While having a farm-fresh holiday turkey dinner might sound appealing to you, these feathered friends are particularly adept at escaping from their fences. The dilemma lies in the fact that fences are necessary for keeping predators, such as foxes and raccoons, away from your turkeys. Thus, you may need to install an elaborate fence to ensure that your turkeys will be safe and unable to roam away. A yard or fenced-in pen of 75 feet by 75 feet is adequate for housing up to a dozen turkeys.

Turkeys also require a bit more babying than other breeds of birds. They tend to be quite social with humans, so you might have to spend some additional time with them.

Small Farm Animals

Choosing to raise small animals – either on your farm or inside

your home – is a personal decision that ultimately depends on your needs and desires, and whether or not it's part of your strategic Gardening Plan. Nonetheless, many farmers find that small animals such as pigs, rabbits, and pigeons are relatively easy to keep, and are often quite enjoyable to raise.

Rabbits

Whether you'd like to raise rabbits as meat producers, for their fiber, or simply because they make good pets, it won't take much work to keep them happy and healthy. Certain species of rabbits act as better meat producers than others, whereas some breeds, such as Angoras, are well-known fiber producers. In fact, Angoras can be sheared up to three or four times per year, and their fur is incredibly warm and soft. With that being said, if you choose to raise rabbits specifically for their wool, you may need to put in some extra time for daily care.

Even if you're an indoor or balcony farmer, you can still maintain a rabbit hutch with ease. They're quite easy to care for, and like any other animal, their primary needs consist of food and water. One thing to keep in mind is that the smell of your rabbits will be determined by the frequency with which you clean their cages. If you fail to clean their bedding regularly, urine and feces will begin to produce a foul odor rather quickly. Thus, if you're keeping your rabbits inside, make sure that you have the time to devote to caring for them.

Pigeons

Some farmers choose to raise pigeons for squab. Pigeons are a great option for beginners and are some of the easiest birds to raise, due to the fact that they're almost entirely self-sustaining. After you've built their housing and breeder pairs have been established, pigeons can mostly take care of themselves. You'll need to provide pigeon pellets or a mix of bird seed combined with scratch feed, as well as water. Aside from providing grit mixed with oyster shell for calcium and granite for digestion, there's not much else you need to do in order to raise pigeons.

Pigs

The first step to raising pigs is assessing your land. Pigs require

a fence that is tightly woven and at least three feet tall. You should also erect a dry, wind-free pen where your pigs can go for shelter. A healthy, full-grown pig requires about 50 square feet of space, so keep that in mind while designing your pen.

Because pigs tend to relieve themselves near their water supply, you should opt to place their water supply away from the shelter and food supply. You may also want to provide a mud wallow for your pigs. Aside from the fact that pigs just enjoy playing in mud, there are added benefits to developing a mud wallow in their pens. For one thing, it can help to ward off lice and keep their skin healthy, and it also allows them to regulate their body temperature. Creating a mud wallow is pretty simple; all you have to do is till the area of the earth where you'd like the mud bath to be, then add water there twice daily, or more if needed.

Because pigs produce a significant amount of manure (about a pound and a half per day for a 100-pound pig), you might want to consider some options for getting rid of it on a regular basis. While some of the manure could be used to fertilize your crops, you will likely still find yourself with an abundance of it, so consider asking other farmers or gardeners in the area if they need a supply.

Piglets grow best when the weather is warm (approximately 60 to 70 degrees), so consider this when acquiring your pigs. Most farmers begin pig raising in early spring or late summer. Keep in mind that they will grow at a very rapid pace – a 50-pound piglet can more than quadruple in size over the course of 100 days.

Do your research to find out which type of food your pigs will benefit from most, depending on the breed. A well-balanced mix of commercial feed is important to the stable growth of a pig. You'll also need to make sure that you provide plenty of water for your pigs – they typically consume about two to four gallons of water per day.

Sheep and Goats

If you're looking to reap the most benefits out of an animal as possible, then sheep and goats are perfect options. You can select breeds that will provide fibers, milk, and meat.

When raising goats, it's absolutely essential to make sure that you have a secure fence in place. Goats are notorious for attempting to escape their confines, so select a woven wire fence that either has an electric or barbed wire top. Sheep, on the other hand, won't be as likely to try to run away, but they are prime targets for predators. Use a similar fence structure to keep danger at bay.

Neither sheep nor goats require any elaborate types of housing, but they do need access to an area that can block wind and provide dryness during bad weather.

While it might seem like a good idea to only purchase one or two sheep or goats, you might actually be better off purchasing up to five, even if you're a beginner, especially if you're using the animals for milk. The reason behind this is that the setup of the milking equipment can be somewhat time consuming, so to make your efforts worthwhile, it's best to have a few animals that you can milk.

Prepping Your Produce for Year Round Consumption

Anyone who has seen the efforts required to create a harvest from start to finish knows the value of their end products. From the initial preparation phase to the composting process, practiced gardeners have an acute understanding of the amount of time, efforts, and resources that go into developing a survival garden. Thus, making sure that all of the usable food produced in the garden gets eaten becomes a priority.

Nonetheless, if you aren't sure how to properly preserve and save your bounty, it can easily spoil within a quicker time frame than you're prepared to eat it. Read ahead to find out how you can properly store your harvest to make the very most out of it, and keep a supply of fresh-grown food on hand in the event of an emergency.

Storing

Some crops don't require any actual prep work, and can be stored as they are. While some fruit and vegetables store best after curing, there aren't any intricate preparation processes involved in order to make these crops last for an extended period of time.

Squash

Squash is one of the longest-lasting crops available to farmers and gardeners. The beauty of growing squash is that it can be stored exactly as is for a considerably long amount of time. After harvesting your winter squash, allow the cut-off stalk to dry out. After that, you can continue to store the squash in an area that's cool and dry for an extended period.

Some gardeners choose to cure their squash to extend its lifespan. As long as the fruit has blemish-free skin that isn't broken or bruised, you can cure it by placing it outside on a structure where it can breathe – such as a window screen or chicken wire stapled to a frame – and letting it sit there for ten to 14 days. This process allows excess water to exit the fruit. By getting rid of extra water, the squash will be prepared for long-term storage, because its respiration rate will have slowed. Some people also find that curing squash helps improve its taste.

Typically, you should opt to cure Blue Hubbard, butternut, spaghetti, and buttercup squashes. Avoid curing acorn squashes – this actually can diminish the longevity of the fruit.

One simple trick that helps squashes last longer is making sure that you pick the fruit correctly. Use pruners or scissors to cut it from the vine; pulling can damage the stem, which could create a wound that will cause rot.

Typically, acorn squash can last up to four weeks, while spaghetti can be kept for up to five. Buttercup squash, when cured, can be stored for about 13 weeks, and butternut squashes may last up to six months. Blue Hubbard lasts the longest, and can be eaten as far as seven months after it's picked.

Apples

The best way to keep your apples for a long period of time is to ensure that they're blemish-free. If you plan to store them through the winter, seek a variety that's tart and thick-skinned. Rome, Fuji, Melrose, and Granny Smith apples can last for extended periods of time. For best results, these types of apples should be kept in humid, chilled places. The lifespan of apples diminishes significantly for every ten degrees over 30 degrees Fahrenheit, but keeping them below 30 degrees will freeze them and cause them to turn mushy. Thus, it's best to keep apples in a humid environment between 30-35 degrees. Most people find success by storing them in their refrigerator's crisper drawer. To keep them moist, lay a paper towel that's been slightly dampened over your apples.

Onions

When it comes to storing your onions for extended periods of time, the stronger varieties will do best. While milder varieties need to be used within a few weeks, pungent onions can be stored for the winter, as long as you cure them first. Spread them in a single layer along a breathable, warm surface. A temperature of about 75-80 degrees is ideal, and it also helps if the air is dry and breezy. Cure your onions for two to four weeks for best results. Once completely dry, you can trim the roots from the bottom of the bulbs. Keep them in a cool environment (35 to 40 degrees is ideal) and away from light.

If kept properly, pungent, cured onions can last up to 12 months.

Garlic

Like onions, garlic need to be cured in order to be kept for as long as possible. You can choose an area that's dry, airy, and shady; the area beneath the tree or on a covered porch works well. Don't place your garlic in direct sunlight – it can actually cook easily under the sun, which will diminish its flavor.

Don't worry about cleaning off your garlic right away, and be sure to keep all of the leaves intact. Otherwise, garden contaminants could creep in and spoil it before curing has the chance to take place.

Garlic should be fully cured within about a month, but if you live in a very humid environment, the process could take up to two months. You'll know that your garlic is fully cured when the roots appear shriveled and are stiff to the touch. The leaves will also be fully browned and dried out.

To prepare garlic for storage, you'll need to trim the roots and leaves. They should be about a quarter or half an inch in length. Although some layers of the bulb wrappers might flake off, it's important not to expose the cloves.

Properly cured garlic can be kept for several months. Creole and Silverskin varieties can be kept the longest, and might even last up to a year. Keep them in a cool, dark place for best results.

Freezing

Freezing is an ideal way to preserve the crops that you've harvested, but in terms of survival, it's not a guaranteed means of keeping food. Nonetheless, if you do choose to freeze your crops, consider only freezing a portion of them, in case something should happen that would disrupt your freezer's ability to continue working.

In many cases, vegetables that are blanched in boiling water tend to fare better during and after the freezing process. Always remove as much air as possible from the freezing container, and

consider investing in a vacuum sealer. Not only does it suck the air from the bags, but it also reduces the risk of freezer burn.

Despite what you may have heard, tomatoes actually freeze quite well, especially if you intend to use them for sauces or soup. If you are pressed for time, you can simply wash tomatoes and put them in a freezer bag. When you decide to use them, you'll find that they peel well when held under warm water.

Most snap beans freeze well, including green beans. When selecting beans for freezing, opt for veggies that are sturdy and large. Small, thin green beans soften too much when blanched and then frozen, but the larger ones tend to be hardier. Many gardeners find that slow-cooking shelly beans before freezing them tends to help in the preservation process.

Raw peppers can be frozen, but they should be chopped first. Ripe sweet peppers should be cut into halves or quarters (which is ideal for stuffing when you're ready to use them). There are mixed opinions when it comes to blanching peppers, but most people find that steam-blanching peppers prior to freezing helps them keep longer. Ultimately, you'll have to find what works best for you.

Summer squash requires thorough blanching prior to freezing. A good way to prepare summer squash, such as zucchinis, yellow squash, and pattypan, prior to freezing is by hollowing them out then steam blanching them. Or, you can slice them in half-inch increments and blanch them in steam or boiling water for about three minutes.

Some gardeners choose to preserve their vegetables with herbs directly inside their freezer bags. Again, you'll be able to determine which methods work best for you as you practice freezing throughout the seasons.

Drying your Produce

There are a few different approaches for drying fresh-grown produce. While an electric dehydrator is perhaps the easiest method to use, you may not want to purchase one right away. There are other, more affordable methods you can use with the resources that you

already have on hand.

One option is to use your oven. To dry your food, simply place it in the oven on the low setting. Leave the door open, and let the food dry out for a few hours.

Some gardeners take the simplest, most energy-efficient route available and just use sunshine to dry their produce. This approach is great for the survival gardener, because it doesn't rely on any electricity.

Some types of produce are better when dried than others. Fruit is great for drying, especially berries. Mushrooms and vegetables can also be dried. For best results, slice thicker produce items, such as strawberries, carrots, and watermelons. Vegetables should be blanched before drying.

If you decide to pack your dried fruit, be sure to condition it in a room-temperature environment with adequate airflow for a period of five to ten days before packing.

Canning

There are two different approaches you can use for canning foods: using a hot water bath directly on the stove, or through the use of a special pressure canner. While the water bath technique is fairly easy and requires no special equipment aside from sterilized jars, it can only heat jars to 212 degrees. While that's fine for canning foods that are acidic, such as fruits and tomatoes, you'll need to exceed a temperature of 239 degrees in order to can foods that are low in acidity.

To perform water bath canning, you will need the following supplies: a set of sterilized canning jars, sterilized lids, and a large pot that's deeper than your largest canning jar. To begin, place your apple sauce, chutney, jam, fruits, or whichever foods you are canning into a jar filled with syrup. To remove any air bubbles from the jar, use a spoon or knife to stir the contents. Place the lids on top and then place the jars directly into the pot. Make sure that the jars do not touch one another. Cover the jars with water, and let boil for at least ten

minutes. Cool the jars for 12 to 24 hours at room temperature. By that point, there should be a small indentation towards the middle of the lid; this indicates that a seal was properly formed. If you don't see an indentation, attempt the canning process again, or freeze your goods instead.

Pressure canners are a bit easier for beginners to use, because instead of using a regular pot, a special canner monitors the pressure and steam. If you do choose to invest in a canner, it will come with directions specifically for your model, along with instructions for applying proper amounts of pressure and time requirements for each type of food.

Conclusion

Alright, well, this is the end of the book and this is pretty much your last chance to get advanced notice on any new eBook we'll be releasing for FREE along with a lot of other great FREE eBooks from other authors! So if you want a quick heads up the next time we put out a new eBook along with other great free stuff from other authors just follow the link: <http://www.pointedpublishing.com/live-off-the-land> and we'll get you set up! You'll receive one daily email that will let you in on 100% FREE eBooks from us and other authors.

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In all seriousness, everyone knows how much a rating can mean to the success or failure of a book so any honest (hopefully

positive) feedback you can give helps us as well as others.

Either way, **you'll always be 5 stars in my heart.**

Now then, let's wrap this book up!

At this point, you are now familiar with all of the basic knowledge you'll need in order to begin your journey towards building a survival garden. With this knowledge, you have the ability to grow a stable and reliable source of food, not just one season out of the year, but for the entire duration of all four seasons.

Beyond that, you also know how to preserve the food that you've grown to make it last as long as possible. Whether you want to live a lifestyle that's completely off the grid, prepare yourself for a major catastrophe, or simply grow your own organic food to promote a life of wellness, you are doing yourself – and the world as a whole – a favor by taking this self-sufficient approach to acquiring food.

Remember that gardening isn't a one-size-fits-all activity. All of the factors that you've read about in this guide will be unique to your location, situation, wants, and needs. If you ever feel overwhelmed or stuck on a gardening decision, refer back to your Gardening Plan to help guide you.

Now that you have a thorough understanding of the basics, this is a great time to immerse yourself deeper into the gardening culture. Attend gardening festivals, visit your local farmers, or check online to see if there's a forum or group page for gardeners in your area.

And, while in many ways gardening tends to be a trial-and-error process, there's a lot to be learned from the individuals in your area who have already been growing their own goods for years. Whether you want to grow a few potted peppers or have dreams to establish your own complete off-the-grid existence, go forth with the knowledge that you can now put food on the table and say that you did it all yourself – from seed to harvest.

Now, if you're looking to take your survival gardening to a new level consider checking out the course *Food 4 Wealth* [affiliate link] (<http://www.pointedpublishing.com/food-4-wealth>). This course is able to go further than possible through this eBook alone.

In it you'll discover a minimal effort method for producing the best and healthiest fresh, organic produce. In this course, the author, *Jonathan White*, bases all his recommendations on his education as a scientist and his twenty plus years of experience as an environmental scientist and horticulturist at the professional level. He teaches you how to save you a ton of money off of your yearly grocery bill and shows you everything you need (eBook and video series) to get started – setting up a your gardening plot and taking care of it so it only requires 8 hours of minimal effort per year!

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